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PICTURING OUR FAITH

Psychologists would probably tell us that the idle pencil scratchings of one who is thinking are a clue to the interpretation of one's fundamental mental self. Diseases can be diagnosed by the way men reproduce certain drawings from memory. Nor is this surprising, for what a man is will appear in the pictures that he makes and the pictures that he thinks.

The converse is quite as true. The sort of pictures we make serve to shape our views. Nor need these pictures be necessarily made with the pencil or the palette. They can be drawn with words as well. Recall the influence of Dante in shaping men's ideas of hell.

That is one reason why hymn-writing should be regarded as a serious business rather than a making of one's living by selling hymn books at revival meetings. Figures of speech sing themselves into men's minds.

Ask almost any person who does not think earnestly to tell you his doctrine of the atonement, and he will quote a hymn—and quote it not as a picture but as a statement of fact. Ask the same person for his doctrine of salvation, and he will quote another hymn. Ask him about the future of Christianity, and he will ask you to join in singing “The Son of God goes forth to war.” That is his way of picturing his faith.



One of the most serious injuries being wrought by the present war is the tendency to represent religion in pictures of battle rather than in pictures of service. We talk about “mobilizing our forces,” we have “strategic moments,” we “order an advance along the line,” we “hold the fort,” we “shout for victory.”

All these figures of speech may seem harmless enough, but they serve to fix in men's souls a group of images which pervert Christianity. Jesus Christ was not a fighter. He never went to war, and the pictures he used to describe himself are those of a servant and not of a warrior. He even refused to permit the Messiah—the one through whom God accomplished his salvation—to be known as the Son of David.



True, the early Christians were not content with this, and read over into the future of Jesus the transcendentalized notion of revenge which marked the current Messianic hope. But Christianity is not coextensive with the beliefs of the early Christians. We know Jesus too well. So long as we think in the terms of first-century militarism, we shall be unprepared for his sacrificial social-mindedness.

The only pictures which we should use to describe Jesus are those which he used to portray himself. Only thus can we protect ourselves from unconsciously stamping the image of Caesar upon the pure gold of the gospel.



Christianity is not a warfare, but a service. The Christian is not a fighter, but a servant.

Do you believe it? Then test your unconscious attitudes. What are your favorite mental images of the righteous man? How do you most easily describe religion?

As a man pictures in his heart is he likely to be himself.